

# San Francisco Bay Guardian

## Bunkering down

Jewish community groups get government help to fight terror

*By G.W. Schulz*

Nate Levine is proud of the work his organization has done to mend the often tense relationship between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Levine is the executive director of the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCC), located at California Street and Presidio Avenue. Prominently displayed in his office is a framed photo depicting the son of a local Muslim imam touching a verse from the Torah that's spelled out in block letters on a wall of the center's lobby.

But that doesn't change the fact that the center must still screen cars in the parking lot and maintain a security detail during business hours. Levine's group even felt compelled to ask the federal government for \$100,000, not for stockpiling first aid, food, and water supplies to assist victims in the event of a disaster, but to increase the center's already beefed-up security measures for the purposes of defending against a potential terrorist attack.

Despite Levine's best efforts to defy any forms of religious intolerance, and despite the cost of incessant fear, the center is in some senses a daily reminder to him of just how vulnerable to attack a lot of people continue to feel.

The JCC was awarded \$97,050 in homeland security funding in December to purchase, among other things, security monitoring stations, cameras, motion detectors, and "mirrors for under-vehicle searches and handheld metal detectors," according to state documents obtained by the *Guardian* through a records request.

"When you get your shoes checked at the airport, some people see that as something that makes them feel safe, and some people see it as a reminder of the world we live in," Levine recently told us.

Six Jewish nonprofit organizations in the Bay Area received a total of \$541,000 in December to increase security at their facilities. The state of California received \$5.1 million in grants during the 2005 fiscal year exclusively for nonprofit groups considered to be at risk of a terror attack. Forty-six nonprofit groups in Los Angeles, many Jewish, received a total of \$3.8 million in December, while six groups in San Diego received about \$321,000. Each group is permitted \$100,000 at most.

Congregation Emanu-El, housed in an enormous 45,000-square-foot Spanish colonial-style synagogue near Sacramento Street and Arguello Boulevard, was awarded \$88,000 to install a walk-through metal-detector system and additional bollards, or short, concrete-and-steel columns that prevent would-be attackers from driving onto the sidewalk.

"We're very much aware of the health and safety of our members," Gary Cohn, executive director of Emanu-El, said. "We are on a regular basis consulted by law enforcement when they want us to be a little more diligent than usual."

The Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco was given \$100,000 to install "ballistic- and blast-resistant glass and [an] electronic locking system," according to state records. The North Peninsula Jewish Campus in Foster City was given \$99,000.

Several of the organizations statewide are sizable nonprofits with annual budgets of sometimes tens of millions of dollars, and \$100,000 for some of them is small change. But the money reflects an ongoing and costly paranoia that still pervades the United States.

Levine of the Jewish Community Center hesitated to disclose whether the group had recently experienced any threats. But he did say the \$97,050 in grant money the center received was a "fraction" of what it spent annually on security. FBI hate-crime statistics from 2003 describe Jewish groups as the most likely to face a bias incident; Islamic groups are second most likely. Many Jewish organizations were conscious of security issues before Sept. 11.

"Synagogues in general have always been concerned about terror attacks," Cohn said.

By the end of this fiscal year, Congress will have allotted \$50 million over a two-year period to nonprofits across the United States for security.

Cohn insists the added precautions are best for his congregation.

"I think it makes them feel more secure," he said. "That's very comforting to people when they come here."